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CIA Assesses Effect of Gorbachev Cuts

Sneak-Attack Capability Would Be Reduced, Webster Says

By R. Jeffrey Smith
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The unilateral reduction of Soviet military forces in Eastern Europe that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced last week would substantially reduce the Warsaw Pact's ability to launch a surprise attack on the West, Central Intelligence Agency director William H. Webster said last night.

Webster, in his first major public address since President-elect George Bush announced his reappointment last week, also expressed a much more upbeat view of Gorbachev's reform efforts than did his deputy, Robert M. Gates, in a controversial speech two months ago.

Referring partly to Gorbachev's announcement last week of a planned cut of 500,000 troops, Webster said Gorbachev had "signaled by word and deed that he wants the U.S.S.R. to be a more active and effective player on the world scene," presenting the U.S. intelligence community with "formidable challenges."

"Some—but not all—of the War-

saw Pact advantages" over West European forces will be removed by the reductions, Webster said. "In particular, they will substantially reduce the ability . . . to launch a surprise, short-warning attack."

He added that Gorbachev's announcement will complicate Western efforts to present a united position next year in negotiations with the East bloc on conventional arms reductions.

In contrast to Gates, who had expressed pessimism that Gorbachev could rejuvenate the Soviet political system, Webster described the Soviet leader as a "highly skilled politician" who has brought "new life and dynamism to Soviet politics . . . [by] pushing a series of reforms that none of us could have foreseen five years ago."

Where Gates had emphasized that Gorbachev faces a "continuing intense struggle over the pace and scope" of the reforms, Webster said "we cannot rule out the possibility that [Gorbachev] . . . can, ultimately, pull off a revolution from above that actually increases authority [among Soviet citizens] below."

Asked about the apparent discrepancy between the two officials'

assessments, a senior agency official later confirmed they did not see eye-to-eye on the Gorbachev issue and asserted that Webster's views represented the agency, while Gates "had presented his personal views."

Gates' address, which focused on Soviet economic and ethnic problems, was privately criticized by Secretary of State George P. Shultz and his aides, who said Gates' exceptionally dour outlook did not reflect administration policy.

Webster acknowledged in his on-the-record address to the Washington chapter of the Council on Foreign Relations that "a major power struggle continues" between Soviet reformers favoring radical change and conservatives, who fear it could destabilize the communist system.

But Webster also said Gorbachev had "significantly strengthened" his position in the Soviet leadership last September by ousting key opponents, creating "renewed momentum" for change.

On other issues, Webster said:
■ By the year 2000 at least 15 developing nations "will either have produced or be able to build" their own ballistic missiles, some of



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... "major power struggle continues"

which could be armed with chemical weapons. Such countries are "increasingly pooling their resources and technical know-how" to speed missile development.

■ The CIA is assuming a greater role in efforts to stop the flow of illegal narcotics, including supplying vital data on other countries' activities to drug enforcement agencies and supporting an "interdiction operation" at the U.S. border with Mexico.

■ "Only about 3 percent" of the U.S. intelligence budget is spent on covert action or secret operations to influence or direct activities by other governments.